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RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6632
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4392
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3007
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7553
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1613
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Baghdad Conference, Syria/Iran, Syria/EU, Lebanon,
Palestinian Territories (3/9-11)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Mar. 11 reported the inauguration of the Baghdad Conference of Iraq's Neighboring Countries on Mar. 10. The Syrian delegation was headed by Assistant Foreign Minister Ahmad Arnus, who delivered a statement in which he explained Syria's position toward the difficult situation in Iraq and ways to achieve the required political solution. The statement also stressed Syria's support for Iraq and all of its people, and condemned as terrorist the attacks that target Iraqi citizens and national establishments. The statement expressed Syria's support for a political solution leading to the restoration of security and stability and the establishment of a new Iraq with an Arab and Islamic identity and affiliation and good relations with its neighbors. The statement stressed that the achievement of national reconciliation must take into consideration the need to confront sectarianism and to prepare for a comprehensive Iraqi national dialogue.

On Syrian-Iranian relations, papers on Mar. 11 reported that Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Army and Minister of Defense Gen. Hassan Tourkmani and Iranian Minister of Defense Mostafa Mohammad Najjar reviewed on Mar. 10 the latest developments in the region, bilateral relations between the two countries and means of developing them. Talks also touched upon cooperation between the armies of the two countries.

Independent al-Wattan on Mar. 11 reported that President Jacques Chirac has lifted his veto and agreed "without reservation" on a trip to Damascus scheduled for March 14 by Javier Solana, the European Union's Foreign Policy Chief. Solana will first stop in Riyadh and Beirut to discuss the Lebanese issue. Papers also reported a statement by Information Minister Dr. Muhsin Bilal to Iranian Channel Al-Alam on Mar. 10 reiterating that the European summit's decision to send Solana to Syria proves that Damascus was never part of the problem but part of the solution and that solutions come from Damascus and with its help.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"The Baghdad conference supports Iraq's sovereignty, independence

and unity. Syria: We support a political solution, national reconciliation, confrontation of sectarian strife, and reconsidering the constitution" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/11)

"The International conference on Baghdad will open today. Hopes and calls for discussing the region's issues" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/10)

"US Democrats call for scheduling withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. Commander of US forces in Iraq: No military solution in Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/9)

"Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Armed Forces and Minister of Defense General Tourkmani and Iranian Defense Minister Najjar discuss cooperation between the Syrian and Iranian armies" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/11)

"VP Shara reviews formation of the Palestinian government with al-Qaddoumi, Head of the PLO Political Bureau, and discusses Syrian-Iranian cooperation with Iranian VP Daoudi" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/9)

"With European authorization, EU Foreign Policy Chief Solana is to visit Syria within days. Ireland: Syria has a great influence and we seek to contact it as a partner" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/10)

"Information Minister Bilal: The visit to Syria by Javier Solana, European Union High Representative for Foreign Policy and Security, proves that Syria has never been part of the problem but is part of the solution" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 3/11)

"Failure of the July aggression means failure of the US project. Hizbollah SecGen Nasrallah: The Israeli myth has ended. Americans only think about their own interests and settlements that rescue them" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/10)

"Moscow and Beijing renew refusal to politicize the International Tribunal on the al-Hariri assassination" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 3/9)

"Ehud Olmert confesses that the war against Lebanon was prepared in advance and had nothing to do with the two Israeli prisoners" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 3/9)

"Israel's Premier Olmert's confession unveils falseness of the governing team in Lebanon. Lebanese President Lahoud: al-Saniora government has lost constitutionality since 11/11/06" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/10)

"Israeli forces kill a Palestinian officer, and the new Palestinian government is to be announced in two weeks." (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/11)

"A UN Human Rights committee condemns brutal Israeli practices against the Palestinian people" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/11)

"A European welcome of the Mecca Accord precedes the Abbas-Olmert meeting" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/10)

"President Putin: The situation in the world dictates continuing development of Russian forces" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/10)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Baghdad Conference.... The Opportunity"

Samir al-Shibani, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (3/11): "The US president needs to come down to earth and be honest with his people, before others. He needs to courageously admit his mistake and failure in the invasion of Iraq and to comply with the Baker-Hamilton recommendations. The Baghdad conference does not tolerate a change in American tactics; it requires a comprehensive

change in the US Administration's vision toward the Iraqi issue, which is threatening the region and the world with dire and destructive consequences....

"Syria is participating in the Baghdad conference because it has a sense of fraternal and ethical responsibility toward Iraq and because the security, unity, sovereignty, and stability of Iraq are Syrian demands as much as they are Iraqi demands. Syria will do everything in its power and will work effectively to render the conference successful because this is an opportunity no one has the right to waste. Iraq is on fire and can no longer tolerate the flames that have engulfed lives, heritage, and security....

"It is an opportunity to hold constructive dialogue and open the package of problems from which the region is suffering, from Iraq and the need to set a timetable for the withdrawal of the Americans and the achievement of national reconciliation, to Palestine and the occupied Arab territories, to Sudan and Somalia. Finding a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which is the core of the problem; freeing the region from the weapons of mass destruction; and fighting terrorism from its roots, not by force, are issues that cannot be delayed. These intertwined problems will be the test for American intentions and will show if these intentions are constructive or destructive. The success of the Baghdad conference is in the interest of all parties, but this depends on American intentions...."

"For Whom the Test?"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishrin wrote (3/9): "President Bush said that the Iraq conference is a test of the intentions of Syria and Iran, an attempt to thwart the parley before it convenes....

"Such remarks do not suggest that the US Administration intends to work seriously to bring Iraq out of its crisis through the launch of a comprehensive political process that will enable Iraq to regain its sovereignty in full and will end with an unconditional withdrawal from that country....

"How can Syria and Iran help without serious US cooperation that takes into consideration the mistakes of the war...?

"Dialogue with the Americans must cover all issues of the region because they are intertwined.... A dialogue with the United States means nothing if it does not include the Arab-Israeli conflict, the situation in Iraq, a fight against the root-causes of terror, and the removal of weapons of mass destruction from the region...."

"US Veto at Baghdad Conference"

An unsigned op-ed in government-owned Tishreen, said (3/11): "David Satterfield stated that the Baghdad conference will be a test for Syria and Iran and that the United States will confront the two countries in the conference....

"This is a unilateral announcement of failure in advance.... This is a kind of 'veto' Washington is using to foil any unanimity or consensus....

"Are Iraqis required to get ready to see their hopes for salvation dashed just because the occupation wants to impose its conditions on everyone, Iraqis and non-Iraqis? Are they required to get ready for a new chapter of bloody violence that will displace the last Iraqis who remain alive? Or is there some hope that the Bush administration will reconsider its calculations and take serious and open-minded measures required for a solution to the Iraqi problem, and that the Baghdad summit will then serve as the beginning?"

"Olmert's Presents"

Isam Dari, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishreen, wrote (3/10):
"Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert confessed that the war on Lebanon in July was preplanned and not a response to the abduction of the two Israeli soldiers. We present this confession to the February 14 team in Lebanon and to those who stabbed the resistance in the back with their poisonous daggers before, during, and after the Israeli aggression in the summer....

"We knew this fact, and Hizbollah knew it. Hasan Nasrallah, Hizbollah SecGen, revealed this. The February 14 team supported the Israeli aggression and spent millions of dollars on a vicious and intensive media campaign during which it tried to hold the resistance responsible for the Israeli disaster that descended on Lebanon.

"We feel sorry for the February 14 team because the Israeli PM betrayed it and deprived it of the claim it used to mislead the Lebanese public first and the world second....

"The Lebanese people are discovering today that those who are trading in freedom, patriotism, and truth are the farthest from these principles and values....

"Those who are talking about a political victory they achieved when they brought the wolf of Resolution 1701 to the Lebanese house are the ones who took advantage of the Israeli aggression to build domestic pressure to help them usurp power illegally and in a way

not consistent with either the Lebanese political structure or the social and sectarian fabric that characterizes Lebanon."

Corbin